

The Unuk River drainage is a wilderness area located on the "mainland" of Southeast Alaska. The terrain is mostly mountainous filled with glaciers and snow fields. Waters in this river are glacial and range from dirty brown to slate blue in color. The Unuk River proper is not a productive sport fishing stream but its tributary streams can produce good trout and salmon catches.

During high water periods, the main river flows bank to bank. There are many large trees jutting from the banks (sweepers) that have been washed out by high water. These sweepers are very dangerous to the boater. Fast flowing water, combined with a powered boat's forward motion, can place a boater against an overhanging log before he is prepared. A boat caught in this situation will overturn rapidly. Each river bar has washed out trees with their root wads rising in the air as testimonials of the waters indomitable energy.

During early spring and late fall, the main river waters clear and drop dramatically exposing a multitude of gravel bars. These clear waters and snow laden time periods accentuate the pristine nature of this river valley.

Some high mountain lakes have been stocked by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Sport Fish Division with rainbow trout and Arctic grayling. The remaining few lakes in this area possess native Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout or remain barren.

The section of Unuk River that lies within Alaska is completely within the South Tongass National Forest. There are no U.S.F.S. cabins in the Unuk drainage or on saltwater at the river mouth. There are cabins on private land at the mouth of the river as well as on the Eulachon River (6).

Blue River is the most unique area in the Unuk River wilderness setting. This area has been covered with lava from three more recent (within 140 years) volcanic eruptions. The lava flow starts in the right fork (Lava Fork) from fractures near Mt. Stoeckl. The flow extends from Blue River to the Unuk River and down the Unuk River to Sawmill Slough. Old growth trees are growing over the first lava flow and second growth trees cover the second flow area. The most recent flow area looks much like a moon scape. The new lava is pocketed and covered with very sharp protrusions and is difficult to walk upon. If one plans to walk on this flow for a long time period, he should have an extra pair of shoes. Charcoaled trees and stumps are still prevalent in the new lava area. Burned wood was one of the methods used for dating this volcanic activity. The area within British Columbia has been designated a Biological Reserve because of its unique character. (Personal communication with E. W. Grovers, Geologist, Dept. of Mines and Petroleum Resources, British Columbia.)

Blue Lake (1) was formed by the lava damming this glacial trench. Throughout most of the season, Blue River and Lake are blue grey in color. The Lava Fork tributary, which is clear, turns the Blue River slate blue in color below their confluence. Blue Lake is believed to possess Dolly Varden and may possess rainbow trout though this has not been substantiated. Blue River has an impassable falls near the Unuk River blocking the passage of salmon and trout migrating into this stream. Upper Blue River (Lava Fork) was stocked in 1970 with rainbow trout. This population has not been checked for production.

Gene's Lake (2) is the first major lake below the Canadian border. All trout and salmon utilize this system. The creek is not large but does support spawning salmon and rearing Dolly Varden. Gene's Lake can be landed in by float plane.

The Unuk River (3) is approximately 50 miles in length but only 25 miles lie within the United States or Alaska. The river has two small canyons with turbulent water. The first canyon is just above Blue River and the second canyon starts above the Canadian border. Both canyons were formed by the lava flow. Neither canyon is a block to migrating fish. The Unuk River is not a deep running river. It has many riffles, gravel islands and bars. A few of the river islands are covered with spruce and cottonwood trees but the majority are swept barren by high river flows.

As mentioned earlier, the Unuk River is very glacial to muddy from early spring to late fall and normally high. This system, with its many side tributaries and sloughs, is noted as a major king salmon producer. It is also a pink, chum, red and coho salmon spawning system. Most of the salmon appear to be spawning in the side tributaries and sloughs. Coho salmon and Dolly Varden have been observed spawning in the main river channels during the fall. Some king salmon may also spawn in the main river channels.

This river can be traveled with a river boat powered by an outboard jet unit. A regular skiff and outboard motor can only be used in the lower river areas and during high flow periods. Fishing in the Unuk River would be limited to early spring and late fall. One could expect to catch coho salmon, Dolly Varden, cutthroat trout, and, perhaps, steelhead during the clear water stages. One must remember king salmon fishing is closed in all freshwaters of Southeast Alaska.

Deer, moose, goats, black bear and brown bear can be encountered on the Unuk River. These animals are not numerous but can be seen and photographed in their natural setting. The moose are native to the area and have probably migrated from the Canadian province of British Columbia.

At the mouth of the Unuk River, there are 418 acres of land in private ownership. Two private sites were known as ranches - Bishop and Matney. At one time, there were 18 cows along with horses, pigs and other farm animals. Presently there are only a few private cabins on these properties.

The U.S.F.S. has a mooring bouy at the mouth of the river just off the mud flats near the Klahini River (7). This is the only public anchorage in the immediate area unless one chooses to run at high tide into the Eulachon River to the Trading Post or to a deep hole in the lower Unuk River.

A horse trail ran from the mouth of the Unuk River into Canada along the north bank. Mining and other supplies were packed over this trail. During the early 1900's, a road was proposed to run along the river's north bank, but, was never constructed. The road was to be used for hauling ore from active mines on the Unuk River and in British Columbia. There was also a timber company that would have utilized this road to haul logs from British Columbia.

Lake Creek (4) is the longest tributary stream draining into the Unuk River. There is a falls approximately 4.0 miles from the mouth at the head of the lake. All salmon and trout utilize the stream up to this falls. The water color has a slight milky coloration, but is still sport fishable.

Minne Lake (5) was stocked by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game with Arctic grayling in 1969. Reports are that these fish are providing the fly fishermen with good catches. The lake is 1863 feet above sea level and is frozen from October through late May or early June. This is characteristic of all high mountain lakes.

The Eulachon River (6) is named after one of the fish species utilizing this stream. The stream has all trout and salmon and has an excellent fall sport fishery for coho salmon. In the spring, Eulachon (*Thalechthys pacificus*) spawn in the sandy river areas. This fish is in the smelt family, which emits a noticable odor of cucumbers. The scientific name means "rich fish of the Pacific" (referring to high oil content). Eulachon were important to the Indians for food and as a source of oil. An alternative name "candlefish" arises from the fact that the fish was burned or fitted with a wick and used as a candle. These fish are captured with beach seines or dip nets during the first high tides in March from the lower river.

Saks Creek and Lakes (8 and 9) are not a tributary to the Unuk River but are in the immediate area. The lakes are very scenic and provide good recreational sport fishing.

Saks Lake (8) has a good population of cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden and Kokanee (land locked red salmon). There are no anadromous salmon entering this lake from saltwater due to a 15 foot falls approximately one mile upstream. The productive creek areas for sport fishing would be near the high tide areas. Upper Saks Lake (9) was stocked with Arctic grayling by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 1969. This population has not been checked. Attempts were made to check this stocking in June 1975; but, the lake was still frozen. The lake is 2,579 feet in elevation.

UNUK RIVER AREA

<u>Area</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Distance from Ketchikan</u>	<u>Species</u>
1). Blue Lake and River	474 Acres	73 Miles	Dolly Varden, Rainbow trout
2). Gene's Lake and Creek	192 Acres	63 Miles	King, Coho, Pink Salmon, Cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden, Steelhead
3). Unuk River	50 Miles	54 Miles	King, Coho, Pink & Chum Salmon, Dolly Varden, Cutthroat trout, Steelhead
4). Lake Creek	4.0 Miles	58 Miles	All salmon, Cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden
5.) Minne	269 Acres	59 Miles	Arctic Grayling
6). Eulachon River	4.0 Miles	56 Miles	King, Coho, Pink & Chum Salmon, Dolly Varden, Cutthroat trout, Steelhead
7). Klahini River	5.0 Miles	48 Miles	King, Chum, Coho, Pink salmon, Dolly Varden, Cutthroat trout
8). Sak's Lake	307 Acres	50 Miles	Cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden
9). Upper Sak's Lake	192 Acres	53 Miles	Arctic Grayling

